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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

Cyber Charter Reform
Monday, Feb. 9 | 1 p.m.

Abington Heights Middle School
1555 Newton Ransom Blvd. | Clarks Summit, PA | 18411-9669

Representative Jim Haddock

1 p.m. **Welcome and member introductions**

PANEL ONE

1:10 p.m. **Dr. Christopher Shaffer, Superintendent**
Abington Heights School District

Anthony Abdalla, School Board, School Director
Abington Heights School District
Q & A with Legislators

PANEL TWO

1:45 p.m. **Peter Butera, Board Member**
Wyoming Area School District, Board of Education

Pennsylvania Charter School Reform Hearing
February 9, 2026
Abington Heights Middle School

Christopher L. Shaffer, Ed.D., Superintendent, Abington Heights School District

Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Much of the charter school reform discussion in Pennsylvania has appropriately focused on tuition rates and fiscal impact. Those conversations are important. However, cost alone is not the right place to start.

If we are serious about educational equity and responsible stewardship of public funds, we must begin with a more fundamental question: What outcomes are students achieving, and how does accountability align with those outcomes?

Pennsylvania already publishes standardized, comparable data for every public school entity—districts and charter schools alike—through the Future Ready PA Index. These measures include:

- State assessment performance (PSSA and Keystone Exams)
- Student growth (PVAAS)
- Attendance
- Graduation rates

These are not local metrics or selective data points. They are the Commonwealth's own accountability measures. Using those same measures, I want to briefly compare outcomes between Commonwealth Charter Academy, one of the largest cyber charter schools in Pennsylvania, and Abington Heights School District.

On state assessments, Abington Heights students demonstrate substantially higher levels of proficiency in both English Language Arts and mathematics.

More importantly, growth matters. Growth tells us whether schools are helping students make progress regardless of where they begin.

Using Pennsylvania's growth model, Abington Heights demonstrates growth that meets or exceeds the state standard, while Commonwealth Charter Academy demonstrates growth that does not meet the state benchmarks.

Attendance is a critical indicator of student engagement and opportunity to learn. Abington Heights maintains very high rates of regular attendance. Commonwealth Charter Academy reports lower rates of regular attendance and higher levels of chronic absenteeism. In a cyber environment, where flexibility is often cited as a benefit, engagement and attendance should be strengths. When they are not, that deserves attention.

Graduation rates reflect the long-term impact of educational programs. Abington Heights graduates nearly all of its students within four years. Commonwealth Charter Academy's four-year graduation rate is significantly lower. These differences are not marginal. They represent real students and real outcomes.

This brings us to the central policy question facing the General Assembly: Why does public funding operate largely independent of student outcomes?

Charter schools are granted significant autonomy in staffing, scheduling, instructional delivery, and governance with the expectation that flexibility will lead to improved results. That autonomy must be matched with clear, consistent, outcome-based accountability. If a publicly funded school—district or charter—demonstrates persistently low achievement, below-standard growth, attendance challenges, and weak graduation outcomes, then funding, renewal, and expansion decisions should reflect that reality.

This is not an argument against charter schools or parental choice. It is an argument for equity, transparency, and consistency. Families deserve clear information. Students deserve schools that deliver measurable success. Taxpayers deserve assurance that public dollars support effective outcomes. If funding follows students, accountability must follow funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this perspective.

Student Outcomes Comparison

Abington Heights School District vs. Commonwealth Charter Academy

Source: Future Ready PA Index (Most Recent Published Data)

Academic Achievement (PSSA / Keystone)

Indicator	Abington Heights SD	Commonwealth Charter Academy
ELA % Proficient/Advanced	~61% (MS) / ~88% (HS)	~9%
Math % Proficient/Advanced	~51% (MS) / ~68% (HS)	~4%

Student Growth (PVAAS)

Indicator	Abington Heights SD	Commonwealth Charter Academy
ELA Growth Score	96–100 (Exceeds)	50 (Below Standard)
Math Growth Score	98–100 (Exceeds)	50 (Below Standard)

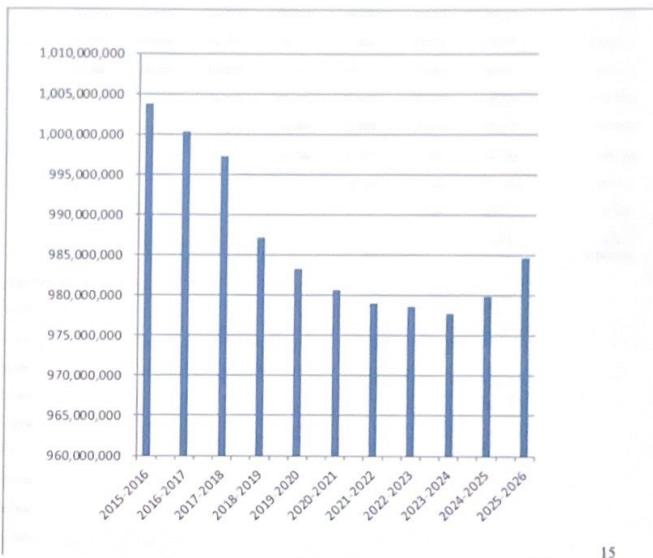
Attendance & Graduation

Indicator	Abington Heights SD	Commonwealth Charter Academy
Regular Attendance Rate	~96%	~90%
4-Year Graduation Rate	~95%	~65%

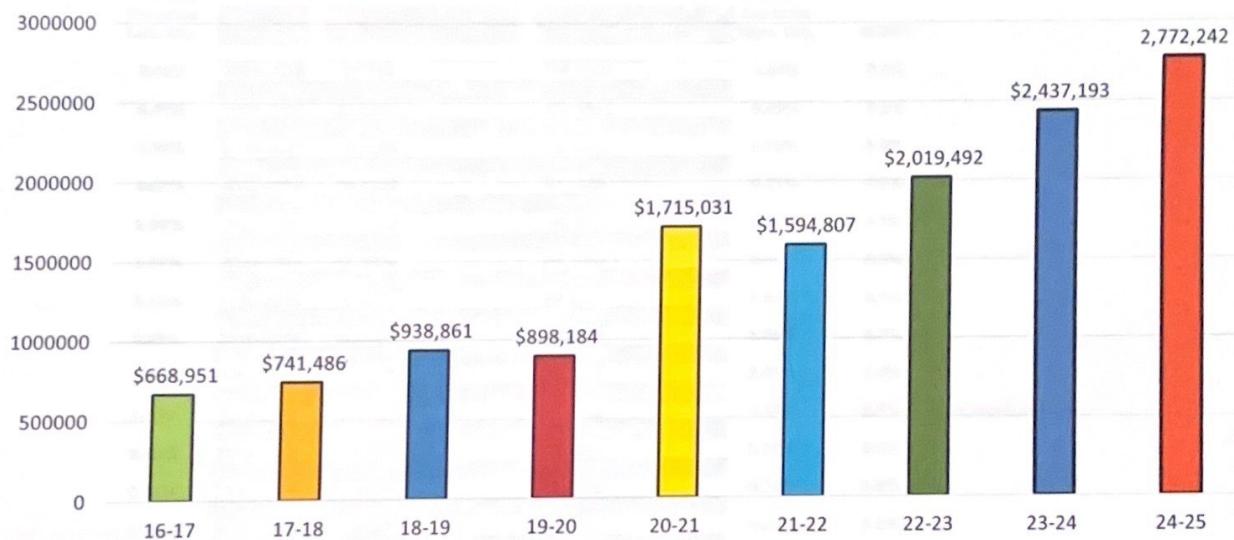
Methodology: Data are drawn from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Future Ready PA Index, using the most recent publicly available federal accountability reports. Abington Heights results reflect representative middle school (PSSA) and high school (Keystone, graduation) outcomes. Growth is measured using PVAAS, where a score of 70 represents the state growth standard. Comparisons use the same state-defined metrics applied uniformly to all public school entities, including cyber charter schools.

ASSESSED VALUE HISTORY-LUZERNE & WYOMING COUNTY 2015-2016 to 2025-2026

	LUZERNE COUNTY	WYOMING COUNTY	TOTAL	DIFFERENCE
2015-2016	994,858,700	8,923,740	1,003,782,440	
2016-2017	991,470,900	8,839,205	1,000,310,105	(3,472,335)
2017-2018	988,423,200	8,889,980	997,313,180	(2,996,925)
2018-2019	978,222,500	8,894,790	987,117,290	(10,195,890)
2019-2020	974,292,400	8,931,210	983,223,610	(3,893,680)
2020-2021	971,689,700	8,997,925	980,687,625	(2,535,985)
2021-2022	969,881,400	9,056,515	978,937,915	(1,749,710)
2022-2023	969,495,900	9,132,410	978,628,310	(309,605)
2023-2024	968,607,900	9,155,050	977,762,950	(865,360)
2024-2025	970,726,200	9,152,230	979,878,430	2,115,480
2025-2026	975,446,800	9,243,500	984,690,300	6,927,350
TOTAL				(16,976,660)



SNAPSHOT OF CHARTER/CYBER SCHOOL EXPENDITURES



* 24-25 Charter/Cyber Tuition line item was Budgeted at \$2,425,000.

LUZERNE COUNTY SCHOOLS

School	Property Tax
Wyoming Area	2.18%
Hanover	1.88%
Wyoming Valley West	1.85%
Wilkes-Barre	1.84%
Pittston	1.65%
Dallas	1.50%
Northwest	1.48%
Hazleton	1.41%
Berwick	1.31%
Crestwood	1.29%
Nanticoke	1.28%
Lake Lehman	1.21%
AVERAGE	1.57%

WYOMING AREA TAXES BY YEAR

Year	Property Tax
2009-2010	1.19%
2010-2011	1.24%
2011-2012	1.31%
2012-2013	1.35%
2013-2014	1.39%
2014-2015	1.43%
2015-2016	1.46%
2016-2017	1.54%
2017-2018	1.59%
2018-2019	1.64%
2019-2020	1.70%
2020-2021	1.76%
2021-2022	1.79%
2022-2023	1.87%
2023-2024	1.98%
2024-2025	2.11%
2025-2026	2.18%